The Future of Newspapers

Newspapers have been concerned about their future for some time now. While the number of adults reading newspapers and the number of papers sold each week are higher than ever before, the growth of newspaper readership has not kept up with the growth of population in this country. Young people, especially, are not turning to newspapers. Young people who seek news for years have turned to television, which has done a superficial job, for the most part.

And now comes along the Internet. The Internet gives us up-to-the minute news the way radio has been able to do, but the Internet lets you filter out the news you don't care about and only receive the news you do care about.

This certainly begs the question: Are the print media dying? University professors and professionals ask the question at their conventions and conferences.

But by some definitions, the newspaper is one of the most interactive media around. That paper product just isn’t electronic.

- You can start reading them at the beginning, middle or end.
- You can stop anytime you want, and start again when you want.
- There are indexes to help you jump around to the spots you want.
- You can take it almost anywhere.
- You don’t need batteries.

Thirty years ago the experts were predicting that newspapers as we knew them would be dead “in 10 years.” We’d all be receiving news from videotext machines (a primitive form of computer). Well, today, the experts are not predicting that newspapers are going to go away, but they will change. Readers will look to both the Internet and print editions of the paper for news. Newspapers have a strong brand recognition when it comes to news and readers who want reliable news will go to the media they trust.

But print media that go online will not succeed simply by shoveling their old content onto the World Wide Web. To make money they will have to provide value added services, such as search capabilities for old stories, search capabilities for classified ads, and original Web content.

In actuality, there is a greater demand today for news and information. Those who are trained to reliably gather information from a variety of sources, synthesize or make sense of it, and repackage it for dissemination in a variety of formats will be in great demand . . . ARE in great demand.

New media, which includes the World Wide Web, is one of the fastest growing and highest paying career fields for the news media. The vast majority of newspapers in the country now have web sites, though most of them are stuck in the paradigm of creating content for their
print editions and then simply moving it over to the World Wide Web. They all know they need to be there, but are confused on how to profit from being there. Only a few newspapers have come close to breaking even.

**The Future of Magazines**

Magazines are thriving today. True, the general interest magazine has gone by the wayside (see the Magazines and Newsletters lecture). But the special niche magazines are catching on. Advertisers are anxious to target their ads to specialized audiences.

Some print magazines are even taking advantage of technology to deliver the same magazine with specialized advertising for targeted geographical regions. It won't be long until the technology will allow them to target advertising specifically to each advertiser.

Magazines are also finding a niche in new media, too. Whether on the World Wide Web or on compact disk, 'zines are popping up. 'Zines are magazines that exist in electronic form only and can contain sound and animation that print cannot. They may cover a tightly focused topic and may exist for one issue only. Or they may be "high gloss" magazines, such as Slate or Salon or The Onion. You can find an index of online 'zines at a [www.online-magazine.com/guides.htm](http://www.online-magazine.com/guides.htm).

And, of course, like the newspapers, magazines are experimenting with moving their print content online.

**The Future of Books**

Book sales are on the rise, but many would complain that they are the wrong kind of books. Popular novels are selling millions and superstores like Barnes & Noble and Borders --to say nothing of online discount stores like Amazon.com-- are driving independent bookstores out of business. The superstores emphasize the popular selling books over new authors and quality, but less popular books. Still, publishers have about 30 percent of all books they print returned to them as unsold.

There does not seem to be much good news for independent stores. But there may be good news for consumers. And technology plays a role in several scenarios.

- Searching for books and buying them online will get easier with services like Amazon.com. Even buying textbooks can be easier to buy online from such services as VarsityBooks.com and other services.

- Bookstores will soon stock fewer books on their shelves --thus cutting overhead. Instead, the text of books will be available at in-store kiosks or POD (Print on Demand) machines. When you know what book you want, the store will print and bind it on the spot, complete with color covers. The process will take about 15 minutes and the cost of the book will be no more than it is now. Even older out-of-print books will be available from these services.
• Even the computer folks are getting into the act. Projects like Project Gutenberg are rapidly putting public domain books online for download. And computer makers are counting on us reading books from personal digital assistants like the Blackberry or Kindle eBooks (as shown). Such “books” will be the size of current paperbacks, but hold dozens of books that you can choose to read at any time. And many have “highlighting” features. Imagine putting all your textbooks on such a device. A lot of high school students, especially, might appreciate that.

Popular novelist Stephen King even released one of his bestselling novels only in electronic format to be read on computer or PDA.

One of the promising areas for electronic books might be in the area of electronic textbooks. You are getting your lectures electronically, why not read your text online? For an article on this, visit Inside High Education at www.insidehighered.com/news/2008/01/03/ebooks.

But what is gained from putting books on a computer? Most people have problems reading large blocks of text on a computer screen and resolution of devices like the Kindle leave a lot to be desired.

One genre of books that gains strength from computers is reference books. Encyclopedia Britannica, for instance, has printed its last set of leather bound libraries. After a brief try at selling the encyclopedia via CD-ROM disk, the company put the information on the World Wide Web. The ability to search reference volumes with an electronic search engine makes them more usable.

Another popular format is the audio book. Most popular books these days have a simultaneous release in audio format. Once just for the blind, the audio books are finding popularity with those who spend a lot of time traveling in cars. For instance, I do a lot of walking for exercise and really enjoy listening to audio books I buy from www.audible.com.

**Reading Assignment**

You should be reading on books in your textbook to get more information.

**Exercise**

Give a one- or two-sentence summary about the future of each of the three print media -- newspapers, magazines and books.
For a little extra credit “subscribe” to the school newspaper’s online publication at www.talonmarks.com. It’s free and you’ll get e-mail updates when new stories break. To get credit, send an extra e-mail message with your username (you’ll create one when you subscribe). If you are already a subscriber you can still earn the extra credit. The subject line of the extra e-mail message should be J100x – YourLastName – Xtra Credit.